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ABSTRACT

This essay contains a brief review of the theory of teaching communication based on Anglo-American inheritance, touches upon twentieth-century changes in that theory and practice, and identifies certain postulates that seem useful as bases for pedagogies in communication which recognize the unique thought processes associated with creating practical messages. The consequences of the fact that practical communication is a process and a human relationship have been too often ignored or shallowly penetrated in Western pedagogies of communication. The way now seems open for teaching which stresses the relational features of communication and for views of process and sensitivity which open the way for a richer pedagogy in all practical communication. (RB)

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COMMUNICATIVE CREATIVITY AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

by Carroll C. Arnold*

It has been argued recently in the United States and Europe that creating practical discourse is at least potentially a process of discovering knowledge that would not otherwise be discovered. The notion is not an original one. That to communicate seriously is to do something more than to manipulate linguistic symbols was contended by pre-socratic sophists, was strongly argued in the writings of Aristotle, and was a feature of Cicero's reflections on the art of rhetoric. The same general notion had sporadic emphasis across twenty centuries in post-classical Western thought about oral communication but until well into this century has never received sustained, close attention either in theories of communication or in pedagogy.

That rhetorical creativity can and ought to give rise to a special kind of social thinking has had some currency in the teaching of speech communication for fifty years, but it is only in the past twenty years that American and European philosophers and rhetoricians, and some textbooks, have probed the totality of intellectual processes entailed by creation of rhetorical, or practical, communication. Still more recently the need for such investigation has been suggested among teachers of second languages as they have tried to distinguish between "linguistic competency" and "communicative competency." In the teaching of written English there has also been some attempt to re-examine the intellectual

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nature of composing prose; but for the most part, in teaching writing emphasis remains on the management of linguistic forms and on self-expression. It is, then, both an old and a new idea that writers and speakers who become truly communicative learn something more than vocabulary, syntax, paragraph development, and such special forms of communication as exposition, argument, description, persuasion.

In this essay I wish briefly to review the theory of teaching communication which was the Anglo-American inheritance, touch upon twentieth-century changes in that theory and practice, and identify certain postulates that today seem useful as bases for pedagogies in communication which recognize the unique thought processes associated with creating practical messages.

I

Most teaching of communication in America in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was based upon the theory that the art of communicative composition is essentially an art of managing words and verbal forms. This tradition was epitomized in a very influential book, The Teaching of English in the Elementary and Secondary Schools. This textbook for teachers was published and reissued several times in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Its thesis, derived from nineteenth-century writers, was expressed thus: ". . . in brief, structure of thought [is] . . . the main object to be kept in mind" in composing or in teaching composition.[1] This basic idea that structure, or form, is and ought to be the primary concern of composers of practical discourse is still found in those methods of teaching language where vocabulary and syntax are the ultimate concerns, in the prevalent

methods of teaching writing, where sentence and paragraph structures are of primary concern, and sometimes in speech communication when exposition, argument, persuasion, and other "types" of discourse are focused on as fixed forms of communication.

At the root of this inherited tradition in teaching practical communication is a "building-block" theory of how we learn to compose messages. It is a strand of theory and pedagogy stretching back at least to the eighteenth century in England and America. At its emergence it was called the "belles lettristic" tradition in theory of communication. In the late eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries it gained prominence through the wide circulation of such works as Bishop Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres,[2] Alexander Bain's Manual of English Composition and Rhetoric (1893),[4] and Barrett Wendell's English Composition (1892).[5] All of these works and many others promulgated the view that we learn to communicate by (a) learning words--vocabulary, (b) learning conventional (grammatical) arrangements for our words, and (c) learning to arrange sentences into units of interrelated statements like paragraphs. This view of the intellectual processes involved in learning to communicate verbally dominates academic teaching of writing today. Witness the fact that of eighteen new college textbooks on writing reviewed in the February 1976 issue of College Composition and Communication only three were reported to dwell upon writer's need to contemplate their relationships to their readers or the communicative consequences of such constructed relationships.[6] For the most part the teaching of writing in America remains wedded to the inherited building-block theory of how we learn to communicate, though here and there composition is beginning to be taught as the socializing of ideas.

In the pedagogies of speech communication the inherited view of how we compose messages was broken during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Teachers of oral communication found it essential to dwell upon the communicator's social goals and his conceptualization of his audience. At the same time, the classical, audience-oriented theories of communication were rediscovered; and the new social science, psychology, provided teachers of speech communication with the groundwork on which to build pedagogies emphasizing the dynamics of interpersonal communication. The new-old view of communication as adaptive interchange with other persons was made influential by the appearance of such textbooks as James A. Winans' Public Speaking (1915, 1917, 1926) and Charles H. Woolbert's The Fundamentals of Speech (1920).[7] What might be called a classical-social psychological strand in theory of communication and pedagogy was thus restored in the United States and has since never been missing from education in speech communication.

II

Today a growing body of thought about practical communication alleges that (a) to frame a practical, rhetorical communication requires learning the social meanings of one's ideas, and (b) to communicate rhetorically constitutes for a reflective person an empirical test of the wisdom of his own ideas and his communicative decisions. This line of thought implies that above and beyond linguistic competence and sociolinguistic analysis of audiences, communicating rhetorically is an exercise in social judgment and social interpretation--informed or uninformed, astute or clumsy.

To see something of the grounds for this kind of contention about

the intellectual processes associated with communicating practically, we may suppose we are about to compose something with a hope of influencing others' views. It does not matter whether our composition is to be a sentence in a familiar or unfamiliar language, a larger unit of thought like a paragraph, or an essay or a speech. Whatever our unit of composition, we shall need to answer two questions: What is our goal respecting the other person(s)? and What is the idea we want to communicate? If we are skilled and judicious communicators, we shall explore what we know about our prospective respondents' beliefs and opinions. We shall explore what verbal options language affords for the expression of our idea. We shall explore the factors of situation or setting which could affect our own communicative behaviors and our respondents' reception of what we communicate. We would make these inquiries in order to discover how the idea with which we began must be adjusted to suit the understandings of those we propose to address under particular circumstances. We shall find ourselves constrained in many ways: by what we find out about our respondents, by our linguistic options, by the situation in which we communicate, and also by the malleability of the idea with which we began and by our convictions about it. In short, to conceive a sentence or a whole communication which has the prospect of serving our goal, we must solve a complicated problem; we must reconceptualize our initial idea in such a manner as to make it both intelligible and inviting to someone <u>other</u> than ourselves. In ancient and in some contemporary thought the contention is that this kind of creativity, or re-creation if you will, is not in the first instance linguistic; it is <u>conceptual</u>. The problem, it is alleged, is to see an idea anew--in its social rather than in its private dimensions.

Thinking exclusively of creating or re-creating arguments for communication, Aristotle thus described the exploratory, problem-solving process:

> In dealing with any thesis we must examine the argument both for and against, and having discovered it we must immediately seek the solution; for the result will be that we shall have trained ourselves at the same time both for question and for answer. If we have no one else with whom to argue, we must do it ourselves.[8]

I suggest that if we substitute "idea" for "thesis" in this passage, we shall have a clear description of what every composer intending to argue needs to do in thought.

A contemporary philosopher puts the practical communicator's creative problem only a little differently:

> The full rhetorician begins with the question, What shall I cause the issue to be so that I may adopt an advantageous position? . . . In rhetoric issues and problems are made, not born.[9]

And viewing the process still more broadly, Richard McKeon writes:

> Rhetoric is an art of invention and disposition: it is an art of communication between a speaker and his audience, and it is therefore an art of construction of the subject-matter of communication, . . . : that is, of anything whatever that can be an object of attention.[10]

What is argued by these and other contemporary writers is that many, if not at all, social realities become knowledge only through the <u>collaboration</u> of adaptive communicators and adjustive respondents. We come to know many things, not because we possessed them from the beginning or because we learned to say them, but because we learned them through weighing our private conceptions against the knowledge, the abilities, and the readinesses of the <u>people</u> with whom we must share the world.

Very briefly and too simply put, this is a line of thought about the nature of practical communication which some philosophers and

rhetoricians have begun to develop during the past two decades. Essentially the position is that the very acts of creating and communicating rhetorically are, or at least can be, productive of knowledge attainable in no other way. But the pedagogue asks: What knowledge? and How can people be guided to it?

III

Influenced by the line of thinking I have just summarized, a number of students of speech communication have addressed themselves to the problem of locating the unique kinds of knowledge which composing and presenting practical communications supposedly requires and generates. I shall review but two recent contributions to resolving this problem.

In 1972, Roderick P. Hart and Don M. Burks proposed that practical communicators require a special set of insights which these authors called, collectively, "rhetorical sensitivity." Attempting to specify the understandings such "sensitivity" comprised, Hart and Burks argued that "a rhetorically sensitive person":

1. Recognizes that in all of his communicative decisions he must decide what role he needs to play relative to those he hopes to influence;

2. Recognizes that since his interactions with others are very complex and to some degree always unpredictable, no prescriptive formulas for achieving interpersonal success are reliable and, instead of relying on them, he must make his communicative decisions by calculating the probable consequences of the courses of communicative action he can find open to him;

3. Must be willing to undergo the strain of adapting to "the fluctuating nature of social interactions" with due concern "for both the sovereignty of [his]. . . position as well as for the constraints placed upon him by the intellectual and attitudinal make-up of the Other";

4. Must be aware that "because the Other is a primary constraint on communicative thinking, the rhetorically sensitive person seeks to distinguish between all

> information and information acceptable for communication" in any situation he faces;
>
> 5. Recognizes that "ideas themselves do not prescribe forms of verbalization," and that therefore he can render any idea in a variety of ways among which he may choose the way which is most appropriate to himself and to the Others with whom he wants to communicate.[11]

With these five general understandings essential to the full exercise of communicative possibilities, Hart and Burks have made an admirable beginning toward identifying what kinds of knowledge it is students must bring to, or learn through, communicative experience. What Hart and Burks focused upon are how knowledge about an audience is related to private knowledge in communicating and the necessity of making strategic linguistic choices in any practical, verbal communication. Both considerations are all too new to American pedagogical practice in communication.

There is, however, a further kind of "sensitivity" which is implicit in the philosopical line of thought I reviewed in the second section of this essay. It is that we acquire much of our knowledge through collaboration with audiences. If we accept this possibility, we must say that knowledge-testing and discovery can occur as a consequence of communicating seriously. We might then add a sixth dimension of rhetorical sensitivity to Hart and Burks' list:

> A rhetorically sensitive person recognizes that the Others with whom he communicates are also legitimate judges of realities; hence, he will be prepared to review his privately held ideas to discover their weaknesses and strengths by testing them against Others' anticipated or actual responses to his communications.

To say that this is an understanding to be learned by communicators is not to imply that "sensitive" communicators must trim their own views

to suit Others' tastes. It simply means that any realistic and astute communicator ought to recognize his audiences as possible sources of self-correction or even of new knowledge.

To summarize, I suggest that (a) awareness that taking roles is inseperable from social living, (b) awareness of the probable consequences of communicative actions, (c) awareness of the situational nature of all communication, (d) awareness of distinctions between the knowable and the communicable, (e) awareness of the varieties of linguistic options, and (f) awareness of the potentially epistemic nature of Others' judgments are specific kinds of knowledge discoverable through communicative experience. To the extent that these things are true, any modern pedagogy of communication which does not attempt to inculcate at least these six kinds of learning will deny to students that which is their due. And it does seem apparent that contemporary pedagogies are open to this possibility.

During the past decade the anthropologist-sociologist, Dell Hymes, has several times written of a concept "communicative competence," which he has wished to distinguish from the concept of "performance competence" or "linguistic competence." Recently he has written,

> One must recognize not only [linguistic] knowledge, but also ability to implement it . . . as a component of competence in speaking. Especially, one must provide for motivation and value. And . . . the competence to be attributed to particular persons and communities is in each case an empirical matter.[12]

In the same work he observed:

> Within the social matrix in which it acquires a system of grammar a child acquires also a system of its use, regarding persons, places, purposes, other modes of communication, etc.--all the components of communicative events, together with attitudes and beliefs regarding them. There also develop patterns of the sequential use of language

> in conversation, address, standard routines, and the like. In such acquisition resides the child's sociolinguistic competence . . ., its ability to participate in its society as not only a speaking, but a communicating member.[13]

Such observations by Hymes and others have roused interest among American teachers of English as a second language and led them to ask more specifically after the constituents of "communicative competence" insofar as its requirements go beyond those of "linguistic competency." I suggest that there is striking similarity between the perceptions and awarenesses which Hart and Burks call rhetorical sensitivity and those which Hymes calls communicative competency or sociolinguistic competence. It may well be that the pedagogies of teaching second languages are now opening to concern about how knowledge of audience and situation are to be related to private thought and choice among linguistic options.

In writings on pedagogies of written composition, also, one increasingly sees pleas for injecting concepts of adaptation and situation into the curricula of students. For example,

> When the student has no particular rhetorical situation to encourage him to communicate, when he does not know who he is in the situation or what his point in writing is, and when he has no reader in mind, the fuzziness of the whole thing affects him in fundamental ways. He becomes more vague, disorganized, and unconvincing than he might ordinarily be.[14]

Here again, it seems to me, is a call for pedagogy focusing directly upon just such kinds of knowledge and awareness as Hart and Burks have begun to identify.

In speech communication there has long been openness to pedagogies which focus upon what the creator of practical communication learns through creating itself. A number of high school and college textbooks on speech communication--particularly those emphasizing public speaking--

already focus upon what student speakers learn as new knowledge through the acts of creating speeches and testing them against the judgments of audiences. New possibilities for inculcating the awarenesses that constitute rhetorical sensitivity (or communicative competency) continue to emerge, however. One such was generated some four years ago when a committee of my colleagues was commissioned to formulate the fundamental tenets of contemporary philosophical, psychological, and social thought about the nature of practical communication. It is with the product of their thought that I shall conclude this essay.

My colleagues sought to distil into a series of brief propositions what can be supportably argued as stating the elemental nature of human, practical communication whether from the platform, in small groups, or in person-to-person communication. The reader will observe that the resulting propositions adhere to what I have called the adaptive strand of Anglo-American thought about communication, and that they express the fundamental concepts which give rise to Hart and Burks' analysis of rhetorical sensitivity. I would argue also that they express the substantive understandings that must exist for attainment of the communicative competency or sociolinguistic competence of which Dell Hymes has written. Briefly stated, the propositions my colleagues formulated are these:

1. Communication is a process and a human relationship.
2. Practical communication is a communication people use to achieve goals.
3. Everything a human perceives has some impact; hence we grow as we perceive and respond to events around us, which in turn affects our future communication.
4. Human beings have storehouses of images, constructs, and evaluates from which they wisely or unwisely create

strategies for pursuing their goals.

5. For all communicators there is a paradox; it arises from the fact that they attempt to exercise freedom in the face of constraints.

6. A human being's social identity is derived from communicative relationships with others; to be means to be related to other human beings.

7. All people have the potential to make the impact on others through the use of rhetoric.

8. Improving one's rhetorical impact requires understanding rhetorical situation, enlargement of one's store of ideas (through communication as well as for communication), and clear formulation of one's goals.[15]

Each of these propositions rests on contemporary philosophical, psychological, sociological, and rhetorical investigations. Together, the propositions express the supra-linguistic tenets of a pedagogy which does not disregard the importance of linguistic competency but seeks to move students forward to communicative competency and rhetorical sensitivity. Additional propositions might be added, of course. Research will no doubt fill in details concerning how students acquire and use the knowledge subsumed under such broad statements of the "facts of life" in communication. However, propositions of the kind just listed do stipulate minimal understandings students must have if they are to acquire new knowledge of themselves and Others through communicating and by testing their private knowledge against the judgments of audiences. The public speaker, discussant, reader, writer, or student of a new language who does not know or does not act upon such facts about communicative experience cannot develop social knowledge through communicating.

IV

Though the theme of this volume is "Contemporary Speech

Communication Practices," I have focused on pedagogical theories and practices in teaching second languages, teaching writing, and teaching speech communication. I have written thus broadly because in respect to what a composer comes to know through communicating, the verbal medium through which a students works matters little. The peculiar relation between communicator, idea, and strategy, on the one hand, and audience and situation on the other presents similar compositional problems to any practical communicator. The consequences of the fact that practical communication "is a process and a human relationship" have been too often ignored or shallowly penetrated in Western pedagogies of communication. In language learning, writing, and speaking the way now seems open for teaching which stresses the relational features of communication. I have hoped to suggest some recent views of process and sensitivity which open the way for a richer pedagogy in all practical communication.

FOOTNOTES

1. G. R. Carpenter, F. T. Baker, and F. N. Scott, The Teaching of English in the Elementary and Secondary Schools (New York, 1921), p. 219. This work was originally published in 1913.

2. This work was first published in 1783 and is currently available in the Landmarks in Rhetoric and Public Address Series, Harold F. Harding and David Potter eds. (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 2 vols.

3. Bain's Manual has not been reissued in this century. For discussion of Bain's influence on theories of rhetoric see Ned A. Shearer, "Psychology as Foundation to Rhetoric: Alexander Bain and Association Psychology's Relation to Rhetorical Theory." Western Speech, XXXV (Summer 1971), 162-168; and Shearer, "Alexander Bain and the Genesis of Paragraph Theory," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, LVIII (December, 1972), 408-417. See also Paul C. Rodgers, Jr., "Alexander Bain and the Rise of the Organic Paragraph," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, LI (December, 1965), 399-408.

4. Hill was Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University and probably the most widely quoted authority on teaching composition in America in the period between the American Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century. His respect for Alexander Bain's theories is evident and admitted in his two major textbooks, cited here.

5. Wendell's volume of lectures, cited here, is still eminently readable. A colleague of Hill's at Harvard, Wendell relied extensively on Hill's work and on Bain's theories.

6. "Composition and Rhetoric," Reviews, College Composition and Communication, XXVII (February, 1976), 58-79.

7. Both of these textbooks are of historic importance in the development of the teaching of speech in the United States. Winans based his book on the psychological theory of attention developed by William James, and Woolbert adopted as his base the behavioristic psychology of John B. Watson.

8. Topica, 163^{b}, E. S. Forster trans., Loeb Classical Library Series (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 733.

9. Harold Zyskind, "Some Philosophical Strands in Popular Rhetoric," in Howard E. Kiefer and Milton K. Munitz eds., Perspectives in Education, Religion, and the Arts (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1970), p. 390.

10. Richard McKeon, "Philosophy of Communications and the Arts," in ibid., p. 340.

11. Roderick P. Hart and Don M. Burks, "Rhetorical Sensitivity and Social Interaction," Speech Monographs, XXXIX (June, 1972), 75-91.

In a series of recent and, as yet unpublished, studies, Hart and others report that they have found college students markedly different in the degrees of rhetorical sensitivity which they possess. Whether and how rhetorical sensitivity can be taught, or how it is acquired, has yet to be explored. I suggest later in this essay a set of understandings which, in theory at least, ought to foster the kind of sensitivity Hart and Burks postulate.

12. Dell Hymes, Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), p. 96.

13. Ibid., p. 75.

14. A. M. Tibbetts, "Rhetorical Stance Revisited," College Composition and Communication, XXVI (October, 1975), 251.

15. Slightly abbreviated, these are the "major themes of the cognitive core" adopted for Speech 200, Effective Speech, at the Pennsylvania State University. This course comprises four types of instructional sections. Some sections emphasize public speaking, some small-group problem solving, some speech criticism, and some remediation for unusually reticent students. However, all sections develop the eight "core" themes listed here. The course structure is outlined in Speech Communication 200, Student's Manual, 3rd edition (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University, 1975). Copies of this Manual can be secured from The University Park Bookstore, McAllister Building, University Park, Pa. 16802.